



Chapter

**3**

# **SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**



## **SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS**

*for the Airport Master Plan for  
Whiteriver Airport*

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

Examining the specific socioeconomic characteristics of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, the Whiteriver area, Navajo County, and east central Arizona will determine the ability of the surrounding area to support aviation activity and to influence further development of the Whiteriver Airport. These characteristics, such as economic growth and industrial activity, demographic patterns, income, and tourism will all help in establishing the potential growth rate of the airport. In other words, by analyzing the information in this chapter, forecasts of aviation activity can be developed. Those forecasts will be provided in the following chapter.

Specific information identified that indicates Whiteriver Airport may see a higher growth rate than is presently occurring, include the requirements for continued fire management support, potential for increased recreational and tourism opportunities, the continuing production of timber from the Fort Apache Timber Company, and the construction of a casino in nearby Hon Dah.

### **3.1 LOCAL PROFILE**

The Fort Apache Indian Reservation, home of the White Mountain Apache Tribe, is in east central Arizona. It is 75 miles long and 45 miles wide, and encompasses more than 1.6 million acres in portions of Navajo, Apache, and Gila Counties.

The Reservation has a wide range of topography and climate. The southwestern desert foothills, with an elevation of 2,700 feet in the Salt River Canyon, contrast sharply with the mountainous, forested northeastern portions of the Reservation where elevations exceed 11,000 feet in the Mt. Baldy area.

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Whiteriver, the largest population center of the Reservation and the seat of the tribal government, is located 35 miles south of Show Low, 95 miles northeast of Globe, and 190 miles northeast of Phoenix. At an elevation of 5,300 feet, Whiteriver enjoys a moderate four season climate.

Using plentiful natural resources and the scenic beauty of its lands, the White Mountain Apache Tribe has gained a national reputation for the network of enterprises it has created. Leading the way is Fort Apache Timber Company, which employs over 500 people to harvest ponderosa pine, spruce, and fir within 800,000 acres of tribal forest land. A finger-jointing/edge gluing plant was opened in 1994 which more effectively used the sawmill's low-grade lumber, and added 62 jobs. The sawmill operates a retail center in Hon Dah, which sells lumber and hardware.

The tribe boasts one of the best ski resorts in the Southwest. Sunrise Park Resort offers excellent trails, covering three mountains, and facilities capable of handling over 7,000 skiers.

For those interested in gaming, Hon Dah Casino is situated near the Sunrise Park Resort, and offers a full array of slot machines, video poker, blackjack, and Keno.

In addition, all of Navajo County is a part of the state's Enterprise Zone Program, with revolving funds for loans to businesses.

Tribal lands contain some of Arizona's most beautiful country, with 25 excellent fishing lakes, 420 miles of trout streams, and more than 7,000 campsites. Hawley Lake remains one of the most popular havens for anglers and those seeking relaxation. The mighty Salt River, whose water originates almost exclusively on the Reservation, offers white water and breathtaking scenery for kayakers and canoers. Guided white-water rafting tours, ranging from one to four days, are offered between February and June.

The world famous Fort Apache has been developed into an historic park. The tribal Culture Center, a re-creation of an Apache Village, and a walking tour of the Fort are the main attractions. Other points of interest on the Reservation are the ancient Kinishba Ruins, Geronimo's Cave, and the Alchesay Fish Hatchery.

*Source: White Mountain Apache Fair and Rodeo Program, 1995*

### **3.2 BIG GAME HUNTING**

The trophy elk hunting program of the White Mountain Apache Tribe has been in operation since 1976, and has developed into the premier trophy elk hunting

program in the world. Annually, hunters travel from all over the world for an opportunity at one of the huge reservation bulls. Seventy hunters are booked for the 1997 season with standard hunting tags costing \$12,000 each, and premier hunting tags auctioned to the highest bidders exceeding \$20,000. Over \$840,000 in revenue will be generated just from the trophy elk hunt, in addition to the sale of cow elk, antelope, lion, bear, javelina, and small game hunting licenses.

The hunting season has a direct impact on the airport. Twenty-five of the seventy hunters for the 1997 season will be arriving and departing by aircraft. All but a few of which are business jet and twin-engine aircraft. The surge occurs between mid September and mid October, the start and end dates of the scheduled hunts.

*Source: White Mountain Apache Wildlife and Outdoor Recreation Department.*

### 3.3 POPULATION

The populations of Arizona and Navajo County grew steadily from 1990 to 1994 at an average annual rate of 2.8% and 1.3% respectively. The White Mountain Tribe reports a consistent population increase of 3.3% per year since 1970. The birth rate recorded by the Whiteriver Indian Health Service Unit has increased 61 percent over the last decade and is roughly 2 ½ times the U.S. Average. Table III-1 shows the current trend in population for Arizona, Navajo County, and the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Of the 14,500 individuals on the Reservation, 12,000 are enrolled as tribal members, 2,000 are from other Indian Tribes, and the remaining 500 are employed by the Tribe, Indian Health Service, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

**TABLE III-1  
POPULATION COMPARISONS  
1990, 1993, AND 1994**

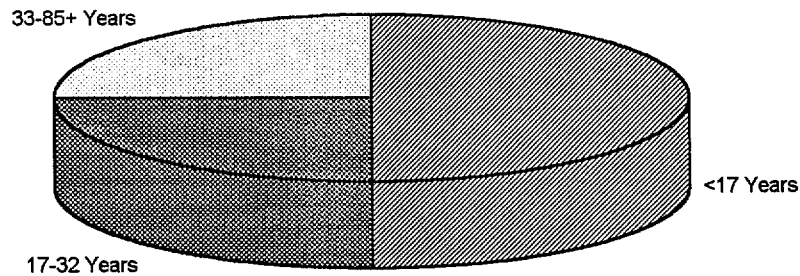
	1994	1993	1990
Arizona	4,071,650	3,958,875	3,665,228
Navajo County	81,750	80,675	81,750
Fort Apache Indian Reservation	14,500 <sup>1</sup>	13,500	10,394

*Source : Arizona Department of Economic Security*

<sup>1</sup> *Adjusted for undercount and documented growth by White Mountain Apache Tribe*

Age distribution of the Reservation population indicates 50% of the population being 16 years old or younger, 25 percent between 17 and 32 years of age, and 25 percent between 33 and 85+ years of age.

**FIGURE 3-1**  
**AGE DISTRIBUTION WITHIN**  
**FORT APACHE INDIAN RESERVATION**



### 3.4 EMPLOYMENT

#### 3.4.1 Tribal Employment

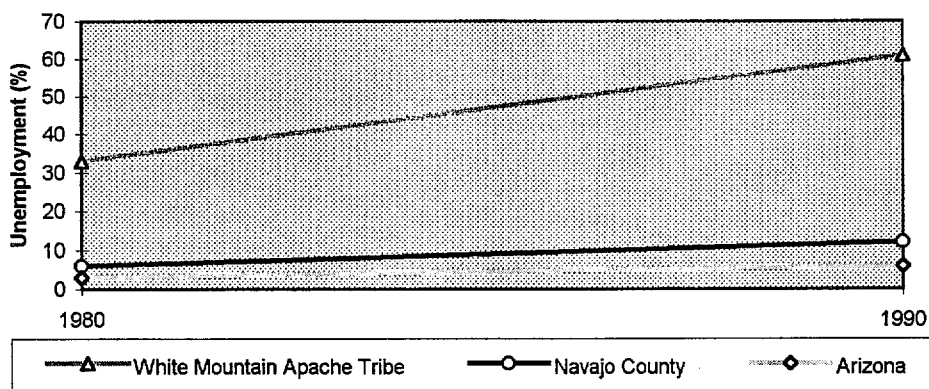
The economy of the White Mountain Apache Tribe is closely tied to the natural resource base. The major source of income is from Fort Apache Timber Company (FATCO). The tribe owns and manages FATCO, which employs over 500 persons. Sunrise Park Ski Resort is the second largest business and employer. The Hon Dah Casino employs 152 Tribal members and is becoming a major economic force for the Tribe. Other major employers include the Tribal government, the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the public schools.

**TABLE III-2**  
**MAJOR EMPLOYERS**  
**WHITE MOUNTAIN APACHE TRIBE**

Employer	Employees
Fort Apache Timber Company (FATCO)	500+
Sunrise Ski Resort	400 (Winter) 150 (Summer)
Hon Dah Casino	152

Despite major economic development efforts by the Tribe, unemployment rates on the Reservation are excessively high. From 1980 to 1990 unemployment rates on the reservation rose from 33% to 61%, according to the BIA Labor Force Report. During the same period, Navajo County's unemployment rate rose from 6% to 12%, and the State of Arizona's unemployment rate rose from 3% to 6%.

**FIGURE 3-2  
UNEMPLOYMENT RATES**



### 3.4.2 Navajo County Employment Sectors

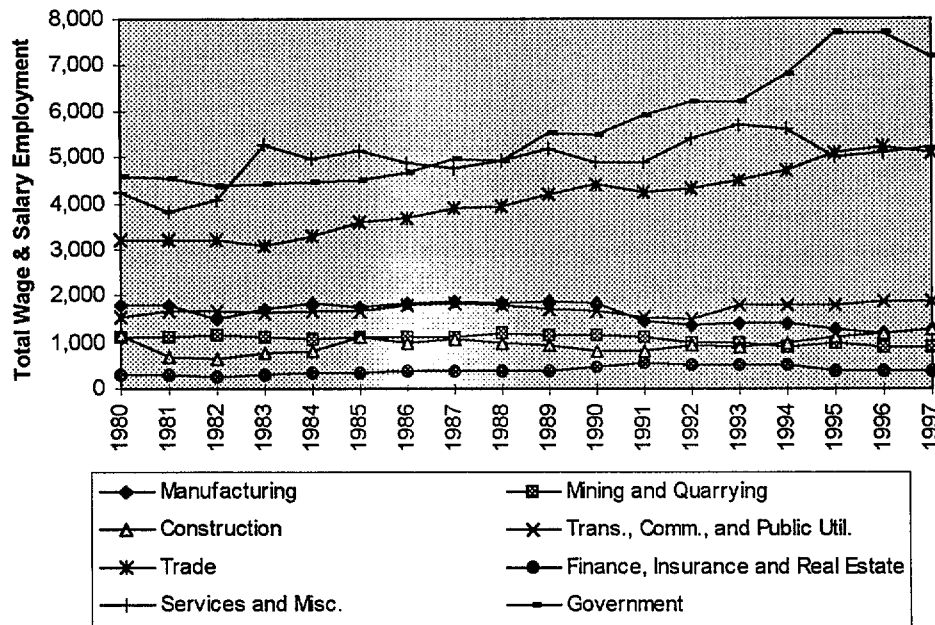
A review of employment by sector within Navajo County indicates a positive growth pattern which may influence aircraft operations at the Whiteriver Airport. Table III-3 includes Navajo County employment data for specific industry sectors for the years 1980 and 1990 through 1997. Figure 3-3 depicts this data graphically from 1980 through 1997. As seen in the graph in Figure 3-3, government and services also experienced the largest percentage gain from 1980 to 1997 with 59.0 and 58.0 percent respectively. Mining and quarrying, and manufacturing remained relatively constant from 1980 to 1990, declined in 1991 and 1992, and have remained steady since 1992. Since the airport is not located within a major mining area, declines in mining should not affect the use of the airport. The development of a light manufacturing or industrial park at the airport could stimulate increased activity in the manufacturing sector and increase use of the airport. The other sectors experienced modest gains from 1980 to 1997 and total wage and salary employment increased 29.3 percent from 1980 to 1997. Overall these factors indicate positive economic growth in the County. This economic growth is expected to increase the use of the airport for business needs, including the transportation of company executives and other personnel, and the shipment of supplies, products, and other cargo.

**TABLE III-3  
NAVAJO COUNTY EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR**

Industry	1980	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Manufacturing	1,800	1,825	1,475	1,375	1,400	1,400	1,300	1,200	1,300
Mining and Quarrying	1,100	1,175	1,100	1,000	1,000	900	1,000	900	900
Construction	1,150	825	825	950	900	1,000	1,100	1,200	1,300
Trans., Comm., and Public Util.	1,550	1,650	1,525	1,500	1,800	1,800	1,800	1,900	1,900
Trade	3,200	4,425	4,250	4,325	4,500	4,700	5,100	5,200	5,100
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	300	450	550	500	500	500	400	400	400
Services and Misc.	4,250	4,875	4,875	5,375	5,700	5,600	5,000	5,100	5,200
Government	4,575	5,475	5,900	6,200	6,200	6,800	7,700	7,700	7,200
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17,925</b>	<b>20,700</b>	<b>20,500</b>	<b>21,225</b>	<b>22,000</b>	<b>22,700</b>	<b>23,400</b>	<b>23,600</b>	<b>23,300</b>

*Source: Arizona Department of Economic Security*

**FIGURE 3-3  
NAVAJO COUNTY EMPLOYMENT TRENDS  
(By Employment Sector)**



### 3.4.3 Agricultural Indicators

The data in Table III-4 shows that total farms, land in farms, and market value of agricultural products decreased in Arizona from 1982 to 1992. Although the number of farms in Navajo County decreased at a lower rate than in the State, the land in farms and the market value of agricultural products sold decreased at a higher rate than the State. This indicates a declining agricultural climate in Navajo County.

**TABLE III-4  
AGRICULTURE INDICATORS**

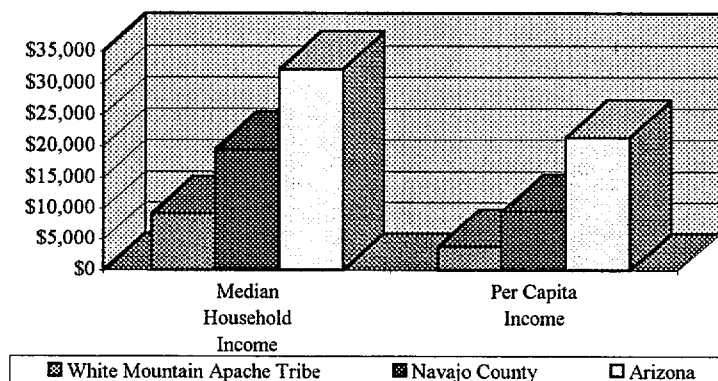
<b>Agriculture Indicators</b>					
	1992	1987	1982	% Change '87 to '92	% Change '82 to '92
<b>Arizona</b>					
Farms (number)	6,773	7,669	7,334	-11.68%	-7.65%
Land in Farms (acres)	35,037,618	36,287,794	37,752,534	-3.45%	-7.19%
Market Value of Ag. Products Sold (\$1,000)	1,515,384	1,628,544	1,526,915	-6.95%	-0.76%
<b>Navajo County</b>					
Farms (number)	375	376	331	-0.27%	13.29%
Land in Farms (acres)	7,229,585	7,687,460	7,313,958	-5.96%	-1.15%
Market Value of Ag. Products Sold (\$1,000)	21,818	29,060	28,208	-24.92%	-22.65%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1992 Census of Agriculture

### 3.5 INCOME

The median family income, according to 1990 Census data is \$9,200 a year for the Reservation, compared to \$9,493 and \$16,265 for Navajo County and the State of Arizona respectively. Per capita income for reservation residents, \$3,805, is not rising parallel to state rates, and has not kept pace with inflation. Compounding this problem is a list of over 1200 households waiting for housing units. These households, typically living with other family members in overcrowded homes, comprise the largest segment of the homeless population.

**FIGURE 3-4  
COMPARISON OF INCOME LEVELS**  
(CY1990 Data-Arizona Department of Economic Security)





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### 3.6 SUMMARY

Baseline aircraft activity at Whiteriver Airport consists primarily of fire suppression activity. The remaining activity consists of medivac, business, and tourism flights. Activity levels of fire suppression aircraft will continue to be driven by forest fire occurrences and forest service demand for air patrols. Socioeconomic factors discussed in this chapter, including demographics and age distribution, population, employment, and income, will influence the trend in medivac, tourism, recreational, and business use of the airport.

Consequently, the socioeconomic/demographic information provided in this section aids in providing future justification for based aircraft and aircraft operations at the Whiteriver Airport. As indicated, fire suppression requirements have historically provided the most significant number of aircraft operations at the airport. Ease of access to the region for these aircraft will continue to be a strong influence in future development at the Whiteriver Airport.